

## A Seasonal Concept of the Lay Pastors Ministry

Hawaii has only one season – summer. I enjoyed the one-season world for seven years. Their 12-month summer is so dependable one hotel painted the temperature on a poet near the entrance – 80°. But in Minnesota we live in a four-season world. And in the Church of Jesus Christ, we are living a four-season mission.

The Church's mission is defined by Jesus, the Head of the Church: *make and shepherd disciples* (Mat. 28:19–20 & Jn. 21:16). He assigned this huge task to the apostles and their successors. The mission at this point in history is a 2000-year "work in progress."

This huge task divided into two related, but separate segments: *evangelism and shepherding*. The evangelism segment of the mission is carried on by a variety of ministries. The shepherding segment is likewise carried on by a variety of ministries.

One major segment (a.k.a. ministry) of the Church's shepherding segment is pastoral care. To care for the flock as the Chief Shepherd wants it cared for takes a partnership between clergy (vocational pastors) and laity (volunteer pastors). Vocational pastors pastor the congregation as a whole by preaching, teaching, visioning, training and much more. They are the spiritual leaders of the church with oversight of the congregation as a whole.

Volunteer pastors on the other hand – laypeople with pastoral gifts, call, passion, and training – pastor a specific number of members by one-on-one, grass-roots, ongoing personal relationships. They can be thought of as *undershepherds of pastoral care associate*.

Imagine a four-seasons jigsaw puzzle titled *The Church's Mission*. As you add piece by piece to form the Church's mission picture, you come to where the lay pastoral care piece fits. (I'll point that out later) Whereas the picture includes the four seasons of Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter, the Lay Pastors Ministry is primarily a Summer ministry. But first, let's start putting the Spring pieces together.

**SPRING** The season for hope – trees leafing, daffodils, and kites, but also planting the "good seed" and watching the green shoots push their way through dirt and darkness to bright sunlight. The seed is the gospel of Jesus Christ – crucified for our sin, buried, bounding from the tomb on the third day, regrouping His disciples, ascending to heaven with a promise to return. In a way similar to Hawaii's never-ending summer, sowing the gospel followed by new life never ends. A

2000-year succession of evangelists offer each new generation new life in Jesus Christ. The making of disciples is a work never finished.

**SUMMER** The season for caring – watering, weeding and fertilizing, but also cultivating God's "field of wheat" as it grows, helping it weather the storms, survive disease and insects, and enriching the soil so it will yield "a hundred times more than was sown" (Luke 8:8). As surely as summer follows spring, pastoral care follows evangelism.

### PLACE THE LAY PASTORAL CARE PIECE OF THE PUZZLE HERE

Peter and Paul are examples of this evangelism–pastoral care sequence. Jesus called Peter, first to be a "fisher of men," and "second to be a shepherd – "take care of my sheep." (I'm not the only mixer of metaphors.) Paul was first an evangelist, then a pastor. He built Christ's Church by winning converts and forming them into local churches; then he returned to the churches to "see how they were doing" (Acts 15:36). Winning converts was evangelism; *seeing how they were doing* is pastoral care. Both apostles were passionately driven by love for people: evangelistic love for the unconverted and shepherding love for the converted.

Paul, in addition to visiting his churches, wrote letters to encourage them in the faith. Some sound-bite writings are;

- To the church in Corinth: "Love never fails" (13:8).
- To the churches in Galatia: "Live by the Spirit" (5:16).
- To the church in Ephesus: "By grace you have been saved" (2:5).
- To the church in Philippi: "I have you in my heart"(1:7).
- To the church in Colosse: "Set your hearts on things above." (3:1).
- To the church in Thessalonica: "You are so dear to us." (2:8).

Pastoral care is far more than member–holding strategy, it is God's requirement! If a church is only converting people, as quintessential as that is, it defaults on the second part of the mission, "Take care of my sheep." Too many churches fish but don't take care of their catch. Such churches are a one–season–only churches, an aberration. As my friend, George Hunter III wrote in his remarkable book on evangelism, *Church for the Unchurched* (Abingdon, 1996), "People worth winning are worth caring for."

**FALL** The season for celebration – colored leaves and harvesting crops, but also enjoying the fruit of Spring and Summer ministry. Some biblical verses are **Fall** verses:

"Let us not become weary in our doing, for at the proper time we will reap a

harvest if we do not give up." (Gal. 6:9)

"He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with shouts of joy, carrying his sheaves with him." (Ps 126:6)

"You will eat the fruit of your labor." (Ps 128:2)

(A sad one) "The harvest is past, summer is ended, and we are not saved."  
(Jer 8:20)

Harvest is a celebration for people who worked, but a disaster for those who burned their time, energy and passion in play.

**WINTER** The season for snow, Christmas, "cabin fever" and rest – but more: "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labors, for their deeds will follow them" (Rev. 14:13). In His Spring ministry, Jesus began to teach and help people; He called His disciples and bonded with them. In His Summer ministry he prepared His disciples for mission He would pass on to them. Fall was short, just time to prove His resurrection and turn His ministry over to those He trained. Winter came early. He left this earth, promising to return at a time only the Father knows.

Later, Jesus' servant, Paul, wrote to Timothy about his approaching Winter: "The time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." Work winds down when winter comes.

I must note here that, whereas in the *calendar world* the four seasons follow the Creator's divinely-ordered sequence, in the *ministry world* Fall and Winter ordinarily follow either Spring for Summer ministers.

Ordinarily Spring ministers (evangelists) are not also Summer ministers (pastors) and Summer ministers (pastors) are not also Spring ministers (evangelists), even though there will be significant overlapping. Paul and Peter were both evangelists and pastors, but that is not the norm for the Church.

Why? The answer is simple: The total mission of evangelism–pastoral care is too big a task for any one human being, especially when "the harvest is plentiful." God gives individually-tailored gifts to be either an evangelist or a pastor – "If was He who gave some to be...evangelists, and some to be pastors..." (Eph 4:11) No Christian has time, energy and passion to major in both evangelism and pastoral care. This means that each Christian is a specialist in the area of their spiritual gifts. Here is a very important insight, and quite new: All activities and ministries of the Church and

tributaries flowing into either of the two great rivers – evangelism or shepherding. Together, they constitute the one mission given by Christ.

\* To do both evangelism and shepherding, the entire church membership has to mobilize.

I feel the need to correct the notion that every Christian is to evangelize and shepherd. It is true that every Christian's character and life style is to include witnessing for Christ and loving one another, but evangelism goes beyond witnessing and pastoral care goes beyond loving one another. Witnessing for Christ comes short of evangelism like telling your neighbor about your care is different from a salesperson writing up the order. Loving one another comes short of pastoral care like the visit of a friend to a hospital patient is different from the visit of the doctor.

Evangelism incorporates witnessing into the ministry of midwife-ing people into the kingdom of God. Pastoral care incorporates loving one another into the ongoing ministry of being with members in life's joys and sorrows. The Lay Pastors Ministry, though closely related, differs from birthing. Birthing a child is "Mission Accomplished." Parenting is a "Mission in Process." It goes on and on and on. In other words, every Christian is to witness and love, but God neither gifts nor calls every Christian to be a specialist in both evangelism and pastoral care.

While other lay people are using their gifts in a variety of ministries, lay pastors are partnering with vocational pastors in total shepherding ministry. Total shepherding ranges from preaching, to small group leadership, to administration, to teaching Sunday School, to planting and leading worship, to pastoral care and the like. The lay pastor's part of the partnership in one-on-one, grass roots, ongoing pastoral care of an assigned number of church members.

We have already seen that the lay pastoral care piece of the puzzle fits in the Summer season. The *Church's Mission* picture will never be complete without this piece. Lay pastors are specialists in their ministry. They are "love with skin on it" to their mini-flocks which number five to ten church households. They **PRAY** for them, are **AVAILABLE** to them, maintain **CONTACT** with them, and are **EXAMPLES** to them. While faithfully **PACE**-ing their people they discover they are "mutually encouraged by each other's faith." (Rom 1:12) Each Christian has time, energy and passion to be productive in only one Season. Lay pastors, your ministry is a Summer ministry. It will be followed by Fall, then Winter. Sometime in early Winter you will receive "the crown of glory that will never fade away." (1 Peter 5:4) What a beautiful splash of bright colors your Summer jig-saw-puzzle piece contributes to the total picture of The Church's Mission.